

## **WORLD MUSIC FORUM 2007**

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#### **Introduction: a transformed tradition**

Since the end of 19th century, the existence of traditional Chinese musics has experienced certain changes, of which the most remarkable one is the change of the existence from being in its original rural society to becoming an **Object** in the eye of **Others**.

This relationship between **Others** and **Object**, basically, represents transformation from top to bottom caused by the power of **Others**

The so-called from top to bottom means: as a giant treasure house, traditional Chinese musics is sensed differently by different Others. In this context, the Nation regards it as a symbol of national identity; political parties find a tool for political propaganda; theater companies find repertoires for adaptation and performance; composers find source material for music creation; scholars (musicologists) find evidence that supports their analysis and educators find a source for teaching materials. Due to the commercial involvement of contemporary media and tourism, all this would be considered as resources that can be converted to capital...

As to the so-called transformation here means reconstructed or remodeled folk musics by Others, as a result of transformation from top to bottom. If using a classical Chinese saying, different Others can “select the essence and discard dross” of folk musics at their own disposal.

#### **The others' eyes: ideological & artistic**

We can sense from these changes that the local people as the main stakeholders on the cultural arena are “involved” in the two situations: to keep a distance from the reshaping by Others, or to choose the form of their appearance by responding to the restructuring of Others' theory. In fact, our cultural tradition or our cultural heritages we wish to conserve, as describable “texts”, have been appropriated, excluded, dissolved, broken down, changed, reconstructed or criticized by “Others” in the 20th century. This paper does not intend to evaluate the value of these changes, neither denying the rationality of the changes in its historical context, nor maintaining such a so-called “original” tradition. My intension is to identify various factors behind the changes in contemporary culture and the potential significance of these factors in our rethinking of cultural issues. For example, we need to consider seriously how to “coexist” with the stakeholders on the cultural stage of ethnic minorities to experience the tradition and participate in its restructuring.

This paper is to interpret the above standpoint based on my three fieldwork cases.

Take “Xintianyou” for my first example, which is a Northern Shaanxi's folk song genre. I paid attention to explore how did “casual singing” of the local people and had not been so favored by the local people has become a symbol of Chinese identity? The process of transformation reflects the

whole course of Chinese revolution and also reflects how the new musicians of 20th century combining exploration of traditional art and construction of a new ideology in the history of Chinese revolution period. In the region of "Xintianyou", not until nowadays does the local people show a special preference to this genre.

The second case is about al laox in South China the multi- musical parts folk song of the ethno minority "Dong" . Inthis case I mainly intend to emphasize how al laox change in reponse to the scholars' participation. These subtle changes took place according to a so-called "artistic" standard of the "Others" in order to amplify its artistic feature of "polyphony". As a sub-genre, "vocals" is rich in "tuoqiang" with flowing rhythm, melodic rise and fall, and a sustained melodic contour, well conform with the artistic features of music, which make it most popular genre within Dong people. Whereas, the cultural and folkloric senses are on the contrary covered.

If the above two cases are reflections of "Other's" political ideology or a "traditional music" reshaping process under an artistic standard model, thus one of which manifested to a greater extent a change in response to the impact from mainstream ideology, while the other showed a reinforcement of its musical characteristics.

### **Cultural bearer and the Others: a reconstruction**

As to the following case, I would like to explore, from an ethnomusicologist's perspective, how to "co-exist" with the cultural bearer of ethno minority, and to experience, participate and construct a tradition through my recent two years of observation on and participation in Orochen's restructuring activities of "cultural space". The reconstructed imaginary "Cultural Space" Chenderdire is a traditional event, by means of which to posited a direct link with the past through commemorating one of the most important social occasions participated jointly by indigenous scholars, foreign scholars, foundation group, and local culture-bearers. As a group of people settling down in 1950s, Orochen still maintains a hunting-gathering lifestyle, but they were driven out of their forest and settle down as peasants for the government's tapping of the forest resources of the Greater Khingan Mountains and under the influence of the linear evolutionary "concept of happiness" of Others. But this transformation is painful that came across a crisis in Orochen identity. In the process of restructuring "cultural space", although the forest is its subject, but those hunting skill competitions, those musics, dances, games as well as the traditional cloth-making, more or less bearing a trace through communication of different peoples(for instance Han and Mongolia). Hence, what does a "cultural space" make sense? Is it in order to reconstruct a pure past or to let the social vulnerable group making their own voice?

From my point of view, the Orochens, as an ethnic group of China that was losing the features of its own language and traditional culture at such a fast pace, have been in a state of passively changing their way of life, production and cultural inheritance, and hence suffering serious "aphasia". Faced with such a reality, we should not keep on, as "Others", identifying what tradition in their cultural life is worth preserving and what is mixed with the civilization from outside. What we should do is to let them speak for their own culture. Such a reconstructed "Chenderdiren" is just a cultural space that integrates their self-awareness and self-identity.

As a scholar, I have realized in the process of restructuring the cultural space “Chenderdiren” that we cannot ascertain the typicality of a traditional culture or judge its essence and dress simply based on the knowledge typical of a certain age. But more importantly, we should let the stakeholders on the arena speak for their own culture and carefully address the issues of who is to be protected, and by whom? What is to be protected, and how?